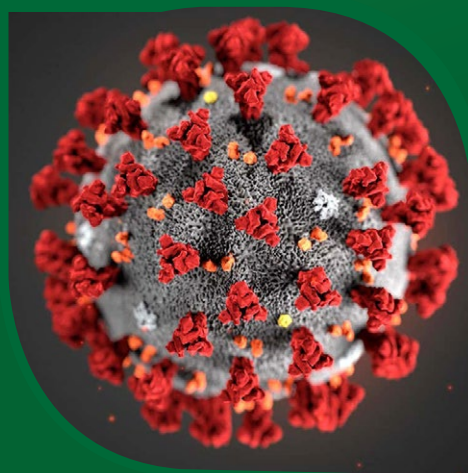


Civil Society's Response to COVID-19 in Ghana: Actions, Results and Lessons Learned



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| CHAG | Christian Health Association of Ghana |
| COVID-19 | Corona Virus Disease 2019 |
| CRP | COVID-19 Response Project |
| CSOs | Civil Society Organisations |
| FIDA | International Federation of Women Lawyers |
| GFDO | Ghana Federation of Disability Organisation |
| IEC | Informative Educative Communication |
| MFWA | Media Foundation West Africa |
| NBSSI | National Business for Small Scale Industries |
| NCC | National Commission on Civic Education |
| NGOs | Non-Governmental Organisations |
| PWD | People with Disability |
| SBCC | Social Behavioural Change Communication |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SITREP | Situational Report |
| WACSI | West Africa Civil Society Institute |



Photo by Caritas Ghana

ABSTRACT

The advent of COVID-19 in Ghana from 27 March 2020 created palpable fear and panic among citizens on the nation's ability to manage this novel virus. In response, STAR Ghana Foundation in partnership with eight civil society organisations (CSOs), from April to August 2020, rolled out a CSOs COVID-19 Response Project (CRP) to support government's effort to prevent, manage and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in the country. The project fostered key engagement with the media and other state actors.

Using a qualitative approach, this paper presents the key highlights of the outcomes, impact and lessons learned from CSOs' responses to COVID-19 in Ghana. This paper provides a repository of information on CSOs' responses to COVID-19 in Ghana for civil society in Ghana and other countries to learn from to ensure effective responses to crisis. It also seeks to increase the visibility and reach of civil society responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The paper reveals that, CSOs' actions on COVID-19 in Ghana has increased citizens' access to information on COVID-19; improved citizens' behavioural change around COVID-19 and adherence to the safety protocols; reduced the negative socio-economic effects of the pandemic on citizens; increased transparency and responsiveness on state response measures to marginalised and vulnerable groups; and improved documentation of the CSO response actions. The paper principally recommends that civil society, government and other stakeholders need to work in a collaborative and coordinated manner in responding to crisis such as COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the novel COVID-19 pandemic affected many aspects of the social and economic lives of people. Following the first two recorded cases of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana in early March 2020 (Garda World, 2020), rapid government' response actions such as the provision of treatment facilities and equipment, travel restrictions, lockdowns, banning of large gatherings and social distancing, were established to manage the pandemic, save lives and curb its negative effects (EPIC Africa & African NGO, 2020; WHO, 2020).

To a considerable extent, these measures helped to reduce the spread of the virus. But it also increased the negative impact of the pandemic on a considerable segment of the population, including marginalised groups. In such situations, like the cases of the Ebola and HIV/AIDS challenge (Wamai, 2014; Beekman et al., 2015), the active engagement of civil society in protecting citizens' rights, supporting marginalised people and ensuring accountability and transparency is eminently needed to effectively mitigate the impact of the pandemic (Jönsson & Jönsson, 2012; Alves et al., 2020).

Although the pandemic also affected the survival of many civil society organisations (CSOs) in Africa (EPIC Africa & African NGO, 2020), CSOs in Ghana, mobilised resources to support the most vulnerable in the society and complement government's actions to fight against the pandemic. However, some of the CSOs' responses were in isolation to each other, uncoordinated and involved little or no collaboration with other actors leading to duplication of efforts and neglect of critical segments of



Photo by Caritas Ghana

the population and according to the Executive Director of the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI), Nana Asantewa Afadzina, “building partnerships among civil societies and with other development stakeholders is needed to effectively fight the pandemic¹”.

To promote such partnership and coordinate CSOs’ responses to COVID-19, STAR Ghana Foundation with support from UKAid and European Union launched the ‘COVID-19 Response Project’ (CRP) on 28 April 2020. The project was designed to support coordinated civil society actions around COVID-19 prevention, management and mitigation. In this project, STAR Ghana Foundation partnered with eight strategic CSOs and several sub-partners in rolling out the project across the country². The project partners include; Christian Health Association of Ghana (CHAG); Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations (GFDO); CARITAS-Ghana; Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA); Penplubbytes; CSOs Platform on SDGs; International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) and the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI).

The goal of the project was to support and complement efforts by government and other stakeholders to prevent the spread of the virus and mitigate the effects and risks of the pandemic on vulnerable and marginalised groups. The project was implemented under four key objectives;

- To increase and improve on citizens’ access to accurate, timely, inclusive and relevant information on COVID-19 and response actions.
- To support communities, NGOs and other citizens’ groups develop and implement initiatives at local and national levels for supporting vulnerable groups and the implementation of national and local response plans.
- Increase the transparency, responsiveness and accountability of government and its relevant agencies to citizens around the development and implementation of COVID-19 response plans, including the utilisation of resources.
- To harvest, document and share learning around COVID-19 responses.

This Issue paper presents the key highlights of the outcomes, impacts and lessons learned from CSOs responses to COVID-19 in Ghana. The paper is organised in eight sections which includes the methodology, project outcome, project dissemination activities, impact, challenges and lessons learned, and recommendations and conclusion. Through a coherent synthesis of the project activities, this paper seeks to provide a repository of information on CSOs responses to COVID-19 for civil society in Ghana and other countries to learn from to ensure effective responses to crisis.

1.0 COVID-19 IN GHANA: PROBLEM STATEMENT

Public knowledge, access to timely and accurate information on COVID-19 transmission, preventive measures and treatment mechanisms became very crucial in the control and treatment of the coronavirus (Article19, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). The government of Ghana and other stakeholders used different communication channels, including the traditional media, to inform the general public about the pandemic. These include the regular bi-weekly/monthly updates from the President and the [Ministry of Information](#) as well as the daily online broadcast of the current situation of the pandemic from the [Ghana Health Service](#). Despite these communication strategies, many of the poor and marginalised population and People with Disabilities (PwDs) were left out.

¹ Adopted from the Executive Director of WACSI, Nana Asantewa Afadzina speech during the virtual launch of the STAR Ghana Citizen Response Project, <https://bit.ly/335giy1>

² Adopted from Executive Director of STAR Ghana Foundation, Ibrahim-Tanko Amidu presentation at the virtual launch of the CRP, <https://bit.ly/335giy1>

On the other hand, the high number of coronavirus recorded cases in urban centres like Kumasi, Accra and Tema environs created a perception of the virus as an urban disease. As a result, minimal efforts and public education were channelled to the rural households and the country's hinterlands. Notwithstanding, there were widespread incidences of fake news on COVID-19 hindering the accuracy, reliability and trust of citizens in the dissemination of information on the pandemic in Ghana (Odoi, 2020). Other critical issues such as domestic violence, stigmatisation, fear and panic and uncertainties were at their peak during the period (IAWL, 2020; Asare, 2020).

The peculiarities of the pandemic also exerted an implacable impact on the most vulnerable and marginalised populations in Ghana. The institution of government measures such as the three weeks lockdown in Greater Accra and Greater Kumasi (the most populated and the major economic hubs of Ghana), compulsory wearing of face masks and the ban on travelling, left the homeless especially street children in despair. These measures threw women and children, slum dwellers, the informal economic dependant populace and people in deprived communities into an even worse economic situation. The negative impact of the pandemic on psychosocial and physical state of frontline health workers, the disabled and critically ill patients, is also worth stating. Also, there was the need to increase transparency, responsiveness and accountability of government response actions and use of resources to the people.

In response, STAR Ghana Foundation under the CRP, from 1 April 2020 through to 31 August 2020, allocated eight hundred thousand Pounds (£800,000.00) to eight CSOs in Ghana with different areas of expertise to form a partnership mix working on various aspects of the project. This paper provides a preview of the partners' response actions, results, outcomes and lessons learned from the CSOs coordinated response actions to COVID-19 in Ghana.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The paper adopted a qualitative approach in collating, analysing and documenting the project response actions, outcomes and interventions. The methodology involved the use of several techniques such as interviews with partners, organising shared learning meetings and the monthly documentation of activities and situation reports (SITREP)³. The data collection and documentation of partners response actions started from the very onset

³ Monthly Situational Reports of partners activities and other highlights from other CSOs are documented, <https://bit.ly/3lYH6ss>



Photo by Caritas Ghana

of the project implementation. The project partners were engaged frequently to capture key highlights of their activities, outcomes and lessons learned from the implementation of the project. Additional secondary data were also obtained from online resources such as blogs, partners websites, Facebook pages, news articles, meeting minutes, among others to facilitate the development of this paper.

3.0 PROJECT RESULTS

Since its inception in April 2020, the CRP rolled out strategic interventions in four areas that include; (1) public education, (2) provision of support to vulnerable groups, (3) policy influencing, and (4) documentation and sharing of learning around CSOs COVID-19 response. In each component, significant successes have been recorded. This section highlights the results of the partners civic response actions during the pandemic.

3.1 Public Education

The COVID-19 Response Project (CRP) through the partnership of Caritas Ghana, CHAG, MFWA and FIDA embarked on a coordinated approach to implement several actions to promote the spread of accurate and



Photo by CWSA via <https://www.circleofblue.org/>

reliable information to the general public and PwD. The project intervention in promoting public education about COVID-19 included the development of information education communication (IEC) materials, dissemination of information, addressing fake news and fighting domestic violence.

3.1.1 Development of IEC Materials

Through the CRP, Caritas Ghana, CHAG and the GFDO developed information education communication (IEC) materials, Social behavioural change communication (SBCC) messages, jingles and podcasts to inform, educate and increase citizens access to relevant information⁴. The IEC/SBCC materials were developed in English and several other local languages like Twi, Hausa and Ga in the form of posters, videos, infographics and audio to educate the general public and people living with disability.

Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations' IEC materials targeted the different disability groups such as the blind, deaf, people with mental health patients and the physically disable among others. The design and content were developed in [large/bold prints](#), colour [contrasts](#), [audio files](#), sign language interpreted videos and [relatable graphics](#), and some focused on mental health coping mechanisms.

⁴ SBCC messages can be accessed here: <https://bit.ly/2SBVtpm>

Caritas Ghana also collaborated with highly influential religious leaders to facilitate and organise public education on social and behavioural change around [COVID-19](#). The religious leaders communicated messages of hope and to discredit false information and myths, prevent and control stigmatisation, discrimination, fear and anxiety, and improve compliance to the COVID-19 protocols⁵. The International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) also developed podcasts and jingles to create awareness of domestic violence and as well increase the reported cases on domestic violence during the COVID-19 period.

At the end of the project, GFDO and the CHAG had developed over 160,000 IEC materials on COVID-19 as shown in Figure 1. GFDO had developed 10,000 disability specific IEC materials including video in accessible formats to target the different disability groups including persons with mental and psychological disabilities. The CHAG on the other hand also developed 150, 000 copies of IEC materials which include 50,000 posters and 100,000 leaflets on COVID-19.

Key Results

- Caritas Ghana's SBCC activity reached about 180,000 citizens in places of worship, transport stations, markets, and virtual platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter.
- The SBCC and the IEC materials contributed to the growing adherence to the COVID-19 safety protocols such as the wearing of face mask, regular handwashing, observance of social distance, among others by citizens.

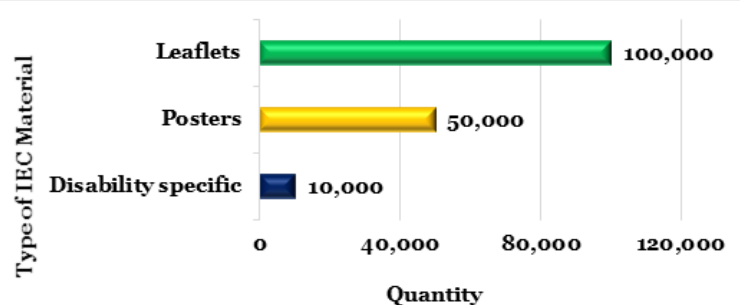


Figure 1: IEC Materials Developed by CHAG and GFDO
Source: Partner's reports

3.1.2 Dissemination of information

To ensure that no one was left behind in accessing regular and reliable information on COVID-19, the IEC and SBCC materials were distributed across the large populace. Caritas Ghana, CHAG and GFD engaged with the National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE) and the leaders of religious organisations to disseminate the messages to communities distant from the district

⁵ The Faith in Ghana Alliance messages can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3dRXsxM>, <https://bit.ly/2VydyDKz>, <https://bit.ly/31AYzys>, <https://bit.ly/3ifymfM> <https://bit.ly/2VzBRnL>

capitals and commercial towns, the disabled population and the poor and vulnerable groups. The messages were distributed using the following means: information van, meetings, house to house engagement, virtual platforms like YouTube, Facebook WhatsApp and Twitter pages and public platforms like places of worship, transport stations and markets.

Key Result

- Through a dynamic dissemination process, 50,000 rural households benefitted from 250,000 COVID-19 informative and educative materials, which contributed to improve the compliance COVID protocols in these households.

3.1.3 Fact checking and addressing fake news

The Media Foundation West Africa (MFWA) embarked on a campaign to counter misinformation and fake news about COVID-19 through its website www.fact-checkghana.com. Reports, features stories and information around COVID-19 were periodically shared on the website and social media pages, newspapers and to MFWA's 50 media partners across the national territory, non-partner media and the general public. MFWA published 17 publications of facts on COVID-19 in the Daily Graphic and the Chronicle newspapers.

Key Results

- The MFWA's fact-checking education and sensitisation about COVID-19 reached 3,202,500 people across the 16 regions in Ghana.
- MFWA's collaboration with the media and district assemblies resulted to some assemblies taking critical actions at the height of the pandemic such as supporting persons with disability with self-sustaining items and cancelling of market days.
- Over 40,000 people were reached daily and on radio with public awareness/education on COVID-19 and fact-checked reports that countered claims, myths and misconceptions about the disease at the national, regional and local levels.

3.1.4 Addressing domestic violence

The International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) worked towards reducing cases of domestic violence and abuses during the pandemic. FIDA produced podcasts and jingles in local languages such as Twi, Ga and Ewe to create awareness on domestic violence and abuses in Ghana. FIDA also provided legal assistance to victims and encouraged citizens to report cases of violence during COVID-19 in Ghana.

3.2 Supporting Vulnerable Groups

STAR Ghana Foundation COVID-19 Response Project implemented two activities to support coordinating responses to the plight of vulnerable groups and support to health workers. These included coordinating responses to vulnerable groups and coordinating support to the health workers.

3.2.1 Coordinating responses to vulnerable groups

In the project implementation, the project partners advocated for the inclusion of vulnerable groups in the national and local COVID-19 response plans. Caritas Ghana in partnership with the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) organised a fundraising from donor organisations in Ghana for vulnerable groups to have access to improved emergency and relief support services. Similarly, the Ghana Federation of Disability Organisation also advocated for the inclusion of PwD in the government's response packages.

On the other hand, Ghana CSOs Platform on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in partnership with other CSOs, networks, coalitions and strategic partners, established the [CSO COVID-19 Response Fund](#) to complement and support the varied efforts of the government. Through the COVID-19 response fund, GHS 119,712.62 cash donations were raised from 78 contributors which constitute 10 individuals, 67 Institutions, 1 unidentified⁶. The CSOs Platform on SDGs through this project facilitated Phases I and II of the donation exercise of the CSO COVID-19 Response Fund. Table 2 provides in the review of the donation. Under phase II, the CSOs Platform on the SDGs coordinated the procurement of 5000 pieces of facemasks and 9000 copies of Self-Adhesive Vinyl (SAV) Stickers, IEC materials.

Table 1: Phase I and II donation items from the CSO COVID-19 Response Fund

| Phase | Items | Quantities | Total Beneficiaries |
|----------|---------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Phase I | 25kg rice | 230 bags | 1,437 people |
| | 5L cooking oil | 210 gallons | |
| | Water and vitamin C | 230 bags | |
| | Facemasks | 5000 pieces | 13 District Platforms |
| Phase II | IEC | 9000 pieces | |

Source: CSOs Platform on SDGs' report

⁶ Source of total contribution can be access here: <https://bit.ly/2UiiUVN>

Key Results

- Close to 2 million Ghana Cedis were raised from the 'Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH' (GIZ), French Embassy in Ghana, the Government of Taiwan, and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (DPIHD) to provide emergency relief needs such as food, Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and temporary shelter to 180,000 poor and vulnerable.
- GFDO's advocacy also resulted in the development of a Coronavirus alleviation programme business support scheme for PwD by National Business of Small-Scale Industry (NBSSI).
- The regular convenings of the CSOs Platform on the SDG ultimately helped influence the behavioural patterns of citizens to play an active role in shaping the discussion on COVID-19 in the country.
- Phase I of the CSOs COVID-19 fund benefited 1,437 beneficiaries comprising of 519 (36%) street children, 258 (18%) aged/widows, 308 (21%) mental health institutions, and 352 (25%) persons with disabilities (PwDs)⁷.
- Phase I of the CSOs COVID-19 fund also benefited 13 district platforms for people with disabilities, street children, aged/widows and mental health persons - with these support materials and information⁸.

3.2.2 Coordinating support to health workers

The Christian Health Association of Ghana (CHAG) supported health workers and facilities of CHAG's health facilities which constitute 35% of health facilities in Ghana and located in 188 districts across the 16 regions, typically in remote areas. Under this project, CHAG trained frontline health workers which include doctors, pharmacist, health managers and biomedical scientists on the COVID-19 control and management. 400 personnel were trained face-to-face, and nearly 600 trained virtually.

Each health personnel in turn trained additional 50 colleagues in their respective health facilities. CHAG also supported the health officials and facilities with prevention, protective, equipment (PPEs) such as 10 coveralls, 500 N95 masks, 320 boxes of surgical face masks, 20 gum boots and goggles, 330 infra-red thermometers, 85 washing bowls, 85 hand towels and 81 120L veronica buckets.

Key Results

- The training of health workers by CHAG showed that 70% minimum of alcohol content is required for the potency of hand sanitisers.
- Potency test of several hand sanitisers used in the market revealed that most of them are of substandard (below the 70% minimum alcohol content). As a result, CHAG engaged the Food and Drugs Authority to call off the low-quality products from the market.
- CHAG's training with CHAG health workers revealed that, many Ghanaian Frontline Health Workers contract COVID-19 in line of duty.

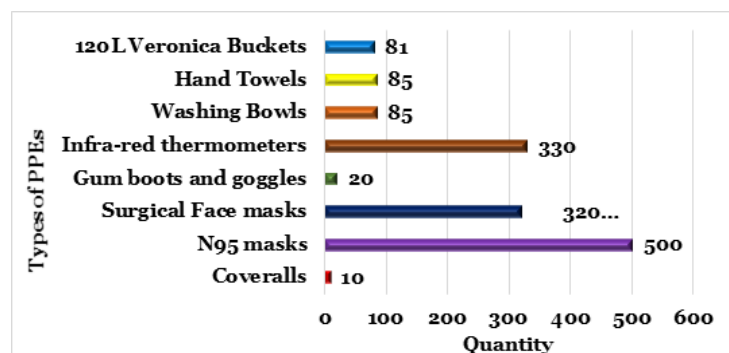


Figure 2: CHAG's donation to health facilities
Source: Partner's reports

3.3 Policy Influencing, Transparency and Accountability

The also adopted a three-pronged strategy to influence policy and promote transparency and accountability of the government response plan to the pandemic. These include developing mechanisms for citizens monitoring of COVID-19 activities, facilitating citizens inputs for policy advocacy and policy engagement.

3.3.1 Development of tools/mechanisms for citizen monitoring of covid-19 activities

Penplusbytes has been at the forefront in ensuring that there is transparency and accountability in government's implementation of COVID-19 response plans. Within the scope of this project, Penplusbytes developed an online platform and a [digital tool](#) that enabled citizens to be aware of governments COVID-19 interventions and created the avenue for citizens to give feedback on information received.

The online platform stayed active and interactive throughout the entire implementation of the project. Regular blogs and podcasts in audio versions in [Twi](#),

⁷ Phase I donation exercise for the CSOs COVID-19 Response Fund; <https://bit.ly/2HoGPPR>

⁸ Phase II donation exercise for the CSOs COVID-19 response Fund, <https://bit.ly/2Zp8V2P>; <https://bit.ly/2Zd9AVO>



Photo from <https://www.path.org/>

[English](#), [Ga](#), [Dagbani](#) and [Ewe](#) with untold stories from across the entire country in different Ghanaian languages were shared frequently on the platform. Additional stories on COVID-19 were aired on over 12 radio stations⁹ across the country.

Key Results

- Over 545,400 citizens accessed information on COVID-19 and the opportunity to provide feedback increased as a result of the online platform.
- Over 1,431,000 people have had access to stories and news articles published on the online platform.
- The online platform has received 1,588,980 direct views and 588,328 indirect views during the project implementation.

3.3.2 Collation of citizens' input for policy advocacy

To complement the work of Penplusbytes in promoting transparency and accountability, the CSOs Platform on the SDGs rolled out two virtual surveys to collate citizens' feedback and highlight the need for the inclusion of the poor and vulnerable in governments' response actions. The survey which was administered across the country was disseminated widely to key stakeholders including the media, CSOs actors and the government¹⁰.

Key Results

- Over 1 million Ghanaians shared their perspectives on the equitable distribution of state resources to curb the spread of COVID-19 in Ghana.
- The survey showed the need to advocate for government to relook at the social protection systems and improve measures so they can intentionally target the poor and the vulnerable.

3.3.3 Policy engagement

Through this project, the CHAG advocated for the inclusion of CHAG's health facilities in the government's COVID-19 allocated resources. Caritas Ghana also engaged frequently in dialogue meetings with 16 MMDAs in all the 16 regions to participate in the monitoring and evaluation of activities.

Key Results

- Through CHAG's active engagement, proper mechanisms were adopted for the engagement of various stakeholders in using locally produced (cloth) and PPEs.
- CHAG's advocacy also resulted to the proper division of the 50% salary bonus promised by the President for frontline health workers among CHAG's health staff in the various districts.
- The project through CHAG secured 18% of government COVID-19 commodities to all CHAG facilities across the regions.

⁹ The stations include Atinka FM, Lorlonyo FM, Radio Savannah, GBC Radio, Arise FM, Sweet FM, Rite FM, 3FM, Radio Peace, Latenu Radio, Radio Ada, Beyond FM

¹⁰ Access to the dissemination of the survey results can be access here: <https://bit.ly/3kEblK9> <https://bit.ly/353zzmb> <https://bit.ly/2QOJlqn> <https://bit.ly/2FK9kXU> <https://bit.ly/33O73mp>

- Caritas Ghana's participatory monitoring and evaluation activities and engagement with the MMDAs resulted in the improvement of the responsiveness of 16 MMDAs in the area of social service delivery for vulnerable persons.

3.4 Documentation and Sharing Learning

To promote knowledge sharing, learning and documentation, the project adopted a progressive data collection of information on the coordinated efforts and actions of CSOs' responses to the pandemic. Project partners were highly engaged through-out the implementation process to share their activities, lessons and challenges. In effect, the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) produced four monthly Situational Reports (SITREP) of the project partners' [COVID-19 response actions and results](#). A partner learning and reflection meeting, and a multi-stakeholder webinar were held to promote collaboration and partnerships among CSOs and between CSOs and the government/private sector.

The STAR Ghana Foundation also organised a targeted media engagement on civil society COVID-19 responses. WACSI documented the project activities on the Institute's 15 mins with [WACSI YouTube platform](#). The Institute, together with [other project partners](#) to share partners' response actions to COVID-19.

Key Results

- Multi-stakeholder webinar created an opportunity for CSOs to share learnings of their respective COVID-19 response actions and to agree on the need to collaborate with the government and the private sector.
- The partners learning and reflection meeting increased the level of synergies and collaboration among the project partners throughout the implementation of the project.
- The monthly situational reports served as an evidence for learning of CSOs coordinated response actions in fighting COVID-19 in Ghana.
- The media engagements highly contributed to the online and media recognition and visibility of the role of civil society actors in fighting the pandemic in Ghana.

4.0 PROJECT DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES

Widening public visibility and increasing the awareness of CSOs' coordinated efforts towards the fight against the pandemic was a key in the implementation of the project. The project dissemination strategy was central in the conception, implementation and closure of the project. Different approaches were adopted to engage the general public, media houses and relevant state agencies to disseminate the project results. These include the publicising on social media and other online platform, engaging with the traditional media and sharing results with key stakeholders such as the relevant government agencies.

4.1 Social Media and Online Platforms

On social media, the project leveraged on platforms such as the Facebook pages of partner organisations, partners' organisational websites, YouTube, Twitter handles, CSOs WhatsApp platforms and on the [CSOs West Africa E-directory](#) platform to disseminate results of the project. Additional online platforms such as the [MFWA fact-check website](#) and Penplusbytes online platform also served as a key tool to disseminate information on the project.



Photo from <https://mybrytfmonline.com/>

4.2 Traditional Media Engagement

The traditional media platforms such as radio stations, the press and television stations were engaged regularly to disseminate information about the project. Traditional media engagement was used to mobilise the general public to be aware of the coordinated actions of the civil society sector during the fight against the pandemic. The MFWA, as a media organisation, throughout the implementation of the project, liaise with 3 national radio stations (Citi FM, Joy FM and Adom FM) and 47 community radio stations across the 16 regions of Ghana to share reports and stories on COVID-19 fact-check website.

The radio stations broadcasted the project activities through jingles, myth busters and dramas. Specific radio programmes on COVID-19 related issues such as hosting COVID-19 recovery indigenes to educate the general public about the pandemic were also used. Additionally, the CSOs Platform on the SDG engaged with the traditional media like the GHOne Mid-day News on 26 August, Moomen Tonight on Ghana Broadcasting Corporation on 27 August and Uniq 95.7 FM on 28 August to share the feedback of citizens surveys widely¹¹. Other media engagements for the dissemination for the CRP results includes organising a press conference¹² on 28 July 2020 and sharing project updates on TV3 COVID-19 360 on 4, 11, 18 and 25 August 2020¹³ show to inform the media, stakeholders, and citizens about civil society's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.3 Multi-Stakeholder Meeting

To expand the visibility to key stakeholders, the CRP activities were shared with the relevant state actors. A [multi-stakeholder meeting](#) was organised on 19 August 2020 to share the project response actions with key stakeholders. The meeting saw the representation from the Minister of Information, Hon. Kojo Oppong Nkrumah; Mr Senyo Kwasi Hosi from the Ghana COVID-19 Private Sector Fund; Dr Franklin Asiedu-Bekoe from the Ghana Health Service (GHS); Dr. Afisah Zakariah, the Chief Director from the Ministry of Gender and Social Protection; Mr Alhaji Amidu Ibrahim-Tanko, the Executive Director of STAR Ghana Foundation; Ms Nana Asantewa Afadzina, the Executive Director of WACSI; and Ms. Clara Osei Boateng, a Governance Advisor from UKAID Ghana. Other project partners like Caritas Ghana and the CHAG also periodically shared the response actions to the relevant MMDAs and state actors.

¹¹ Related media blog post of partners activities can be access here: <https://bit.ly/3kEblK9> <https://bit.ly/353zmbb> <https://bit.ly/2QOJLqn> <https://bit.ly/2FK9kXU> <https://bit.ly/33O73mp>

¹² Press releases can be access here: Opera News, Peace FM online, Today Online, Daily Democrat, Sajocon Media and Okyeman FM

¹³ Access to the TV3 COVID-19 360 media engagement can be find here: <https://bit.ly/3agnX-wZ> <https://bit.ly/3n6oFCK>

5.0 PROJECT RESULTS

After 5 months of fast paced implementation of the coordinated response action to COVID-19, the project has generated several impacts on citizens, the government, management of the virus and on CSOs themselves. The project directly benefitted approximately 638,956 people. It had a media reach of **8,000,000** people. This section discusses the accrued impacts of the CRP on CSOs, the beneficiaries and the government.



Photo from <https://farrellymitchell.com/>

5.1 Impact on CSOs

- CSOs have increasingly embraced local funding to mobilise resources.
- Increased engagements with the media and state agencies.
- Improved collaboration and partnership among CSOs in Ghana.
- Enhanced sharing of lessons and documentation of CSOs activities.
- The use of technology as an alternative infrastructure among project partners has improved.



Photo from <https://www.townandtourist.com/>

- The project has improved CSOs accountability, transparency, and effectiveness in managing resources especially in providing essential services to vulnerable groups.

5.2 Impact on Citizens

- Reduced the socio-economic burden of COVID-19 on citizens.
- Improved citizens' monitoring and evaluation of state response activities.
- Increased the involvement of influential members in the society such as religious leaders to contribute in promoting social change among citizens.
- Increased in the citizens use of face mask and respect for COVID-19 protocols.
- Contributed to behavioural change and perceptions of some citizens on COVID-19.
- Reduction in the cases of domestic violence, stigmatisation, fear and panic on COVID-19.
- Increase in citizen's understanding of truths about COVID-19 as fake news on COVID-19 were disregarded as untrue stories.

5.3 Impact on Government

- Improved state responsiveness to marginalised groups including PwD and deprived areas.
- Increased feedback from citizens on government's COVID-19 response.

6.0 CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Despite the accounted impact, implementation project was phased with the following challenges and we learned the following lessons.

6.1 Challenges

- Insufficient financial support for project partners to fully implement the project activities.
- The voter registration exercise interrupted with the smooth implementation of the dissemination of the project. Discussion of the registration process overshadowed discussions around COVID-19-related issues.
- The Ghana Health Service trainers of staff on COVID-19 were not readily available to facilitate the organisation of training for the CHAG Health workers by CHAG on time.
- Delay in the review and feedback on IEC materials developed by CHAG and GFDO slowed down the printing and dissemination process.
- The citizen's survey which was administered online limited the numbers of people that could be reached.
- Difficulties in segmenting the different categories of visitors such as PwD, gender and age on Penplusbytes online platform.
- Difficulties reaching out to all the project partners to timely and consistently share their activities.



Photo by Caritas Ghana

6.2 Lessons Learned

- The intervention of the CSOs platform on the SDG in coordinating local resources mobilisation from CSOs to alleviate the plight of the poor and vulnerable during this pandemic brought to the fore the critical role of local philanthropy in addressing local social challenges.
- Civil society actors have shown that, focus and attention should be given to efforts of CSOs to locally fundraise.
- Collaboration is needed between CSOs and health workers to address the challenges of COVID-19.
- Bringing together different experts will help CSOs to identify common interests that capture the needs of various actors.
- The media needs capacity building and financial support to understand the issues, access to the right and verified information to sustain advocacy that contributes to, or results in attitudinal change.
- Technology can be used to bridge gaps and give voice to the voiceless. Civil society should embrace and advantage of the technology response that COVID-19 presents.
- Collecting data in a participatory approach and engaging policy makers has proven effective in measuring the quality of government's social protection services.
- Virtual meetings ensure access to wider geographical audience.
- CSOs need to have emergency relief funds and plan.
- CSOs engaged more with other stakeholders especially the relevant government agencies.
- Collaborating with the media to broadcast information on fake news around COVID-19 will enhance public education on the pandemic. Engagement with media scaled up the visibility of CSOs initiatives towards the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana.

CONCLUSION

Within five months, STAR Ghana Foundation in partnership with eight CSOs in Ghana embarked on a journey to support the government's management, control and mitigation of the COVID-19 pandemic. The implementation of the project started from 1 April and ended on 31 August 2020. Through a coordinated work among the project partners, CSOs in Ghana were able to successfully implement three (3) project interventions which include public education, provision of support to vulnerable groups, policy influencing, and documentation and sharing of learning around CSOs COVID-19 response.

Significant successes were achieved within this period which include among many others; reducing the socio-economic burden of COVID-19 on citizens, promoting behavioural change around COVID-19, facilitating local resource mobilisation and effective management, contributing to states' response to marginalised groups and supporting health facilities to be well trained in the management of COVID-19 cases.



Photo from <https://www.graphic.com.gh/>

Contrary to the few challenges faced during the fast-paced implementation of the project, several lessons have been derived which include embracing technology, partnership and local philanthropy. The project therefore provides the following recommendations to the CRP partners, Civil Society Organisations, citizens, donor agencies and governments in general.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To CRP Partners

- **Roll out the post-COVID-19 phase 2 of the project:** Following the positive results achieved from the implementation of the citizens response project, it is recommended that immediate steps should be taken to begin post-COVID-19 recovery and reconstruction activities.
- **Support the sustainability of the project outcomes:** For continuous sustainability of the project results, CRP partners should initiate a strategic plan to ensure that the project impacts last. This can include continuous dissemination of the developed IEC materials and SBCC messages. STAR Ghana should allocate a sustainability fund to support partners' consistent dissemination of project outputs.

To Other CSOs

- **Leverage on local philanthropy:** Collectively, CSOs and civil society actors have shown that, focus and attention should be dedicated to efforts to locally raise funds. Hence it is recommended that CSOs venture into local philanthropy as an alternative resource mobilisation strategy.
- **Work collaboratively but not competitively:** The implementation of the CRP has revealed the importance of collaborative work among CSOs in achieving positive results. It is therefore recommended that, CSOs should not compete among themselves but take advantage of this opportunity to coordinate with each other.
- **Increase collaboration with the media:** It is recommended that, CSOs should collaborate more with the media to broadcast information about their activities to improve their organisational visibility.
- **Embrace technology:** The project has unravelled that virtual meetings can ensure access to wider geographical audience. Thus, technology can be used to bridge gaps and give voice to the voiceless. CSOs are recommended to take advantage of the technology opportunity that COVID-19 presents.
- **Engage with other stakeholders:** CSOs are encouraged to engage more with other stakeholders especially the relevant government agencies during the implementation of their activities. At the local levels, CSOs can coordinate and work with the MMDAs. CSOs also need to enhance collaboration with the private sector. Working with different actors will help CSOs to identify common interests in their diverse efforts to address social inequalities in society.

To Government and other Stakeholders

- **Deliberately engage CSOs:** Government agencies should consider CSOs as partners in development activities including fighting pandemics like COVID-19. Government and CSOs should therefore develop a holistic, multi-stakeholder and multi-faceted approach to collaborate to address development challenges.
- **Adopt different communication models in disseminating government's measures:** Government should employ different strategies to communicate information to the general public. Government should leverage on the potentials and capacities of CSOs in meeting the needs of the poor and vulnerable.



Photo by Getty Image via <https://wicnews.com/>

- **Avoid bureaucracy:** It is recommended that government should reduce its bureaucratic processes. Government needs to develop people-centered systems that address development challenges in a timely and cost-efficient manner.
- **Support citizens' monitoring process:** The state should create the enabling environment for citizens to monitor the implementation of state' response actions especially in pandemic situations like COVID-19. Government should be open to include citizen's voices and needs in the designing of pandemic response plans.

To Citizens

- **Avail themselves in monitoring government activities:** The general public should avail themselves and engage with policy makers to ensure that their needs are well captured and proven effective.

To Donor Organisations

- **Support CSOs in local resource mobilisation:** Following the emergence of the pandemic, CSOs' financial support from international donors have been negatively affected. However, the intervention of the CSOs Platform on the SDG in coordinating local resource mobilisation from CSOs and Ghanaians to alleviate the plight of the poor and vulnerable in this pandemic has brought to the fore the critical role of local philanthropy. Donor agencies are therefore recommended to support CSOs in generating alternative resources of funding.



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